

VZCZCXRO6625
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #1325/01 3491458
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 151458Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8662
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 001325

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GH](#)
SUBJECT: NDC LEADERSHIP ON PARTY DIVISIONS AND MILLS
SHORTCOMINGS

REF: ACCRA 1299

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Teitelbaum for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Amidst growing public criticism of the Mills Administration as it approaches the end of its first year in office, senior National Democratic Congress (NDC) officials - including the President - met December 9 to discuss their difficulties and attempt to close ranks ahead of the NDC's January national conference. Parliamentary Majority Leader Alban Bagbin and NDC General Secretary Johnson Nketia, who attended the meeting, told POL Chief that the discussion was "very successful," and that Mills had acknowledged their complaints. Nketia and Bagbin said Mills has surrounded himself with inexperienced advisors who are providing poor counsel and are failing to ensure inter-ministerial coordination, and that Mills has agreed to establish a "mechanism" to improve consultations with party members. NDC members are also concerned over the the role of former President and party founder Jerry Rawlings, who has been vocal in his public criticism of the government. Nketia cited former First Lady Nana Agyeman Rawlings' decision to run for a party vice chairman position as a challenging development that could prove either problematic or positive for the party as it looks toward the 2012 election. Both Nketia and Bagbin said that the NDC's success in the next election will be based on its performance in government, and that the party must overcome its current divisions if it wishes to remain in power. End Summary.

Mills Meets with Senior NDC Leaders

2. (C) On December 11, Parliamentary Majority Leader Alban Bagbin (NDC) told POL Chief that President Mills convened a meeting December 9 of approximately 45 senior NDC members at the Castle to discuss challenges facing the administration, including public criticism of Mills by former President Rawlings, Bagbin and others. The group included NDC members currently in government, members of the party's council of elders, and individuals understood to be speaking on behalf of Rawlings. Bagbin cited Brigadier General Nunoo Mensah, the current National Security Advisor, as one of Rawlings' representatives.

3. (C) Bagbin described the meeting as "very successful." He said that 22 people spoke, including himself, and that the President acknowledged and accepted the complaints. Bagbin said participants voiced concern that Mills has surrounded himself with young and inexperienced advisors who are not providing good counsel. Bagbin was particularly critical of the President's communication team, singling out Spokesman Mahama Ayariga and the Information Minister as ineffective (reftel). Bagbin noted that as Majority leader he is responsible for carrying out the government's agenda in Parliament, but said that there has been poor coordination between the government and Parliament. Bagbin also cited

poor coordination between different ministries, and said the exclusion of the Information Minister from the Cabinet has aggravated the government's inability to present a coherent message.

¶4. (C) Bagbin added that the government's current constitutional review process is critical to addressing weaknesses in Ghana's government structure, including the role of parliament. He said Parliament must play a more prominent role in overseeing the Executive, and holding accountable ministers that are not carrying out the will of parliament as expressed through legislation. In that respect, Bagbin acknowledged his own public criticism of the Finance Minister in failing to dispense funds appropriated for specific activities. Bagbin said that this has been a problem with previous Finance Ministers as well, and that Parliament would consider using its censure powers.

¶5. (C) On December 10, NDC General Secretary Nketia, who sits in the Mills Cabinet, told POL Chief that he felt the Mills meeting was successful. He also said Mills' communication team was failing, and noted that this contrasted with the successful communication operation that the NDC ran in opposition and during the 2008 presidential campaign. Nketia was particularly critical of the President's Chief of Staff and two Deputy Chiefs of Staff. He said he had been "surprised" by Mills' hiring decisions for these positions, and said that none of the individuals in those positions had adequate political experience.

Mills to Establish Consultation Mechanism

ACCRA 00001325 002 OF 003

¶6. (C) Bagbin said that Mills agreed to establish a mechanism to improve consultation party members, and that participants understood the need to avoid airing disagreements in public. Bagbin also said that the President agreed on the need for more coordination between the Executive and Parliament. Furthermore, many party members understand that former President Rawlings has been isolated and that there needs to be a way to acknowledge his role as the party's founder and as an influential figure.

NDC Party Conference Date

¶7. (C) Regarding the NDC national conference scheduled for January, Bagbin warned that the dates could slip. He said several senior NDC members - including President Mills - had expressed concern that the dates coincide with important soccer matches and that party members will be distracted. In contrast, NDC General Secretary Nketia told POL Chief December 10 that the conference would take place on January 16. (Note: Regardless of the date, the conference must take place relatively soon as the terms of office for current party leaders will expire on December 31. End Note).

Regaining Party Unity

¶8. (C) In preparing for the NDC conference, Nketia told POL Chief that his primary concern is rebuilding party unity and ensuring a smooth and fair election process for the party leadership. He noted that the election is a particular challenge in that the incumbent party leadership - including himself - is running again. For that reason, he said he had set up a separate mechanism to guard against the perception that incumbents have an unfair advantage. Nevertheless, Nketia expressed optimism that he would regain his position (Comment: At the moment Nketia faces no serious challengers, and given the NDC's success in the 2008 election campaign it is likely the leadership will be re-elected. End Comment).

¶9. (C) Nketia acknowledged divisions within the party, and said that the party would have little chance to retain power in 2012 if it cannot overcome this problem. Nketia conceded that the Administration has had governance problems of its own creation, but said that another significant problem was managing the expectations that were raised during the campaign, particularly given the difficult fiscal and economic situation.

Managing former President Rawlings

¶10. (C) In dealing with NDC divisions, Nketia said that for many years the NDC has revolved around the personality of its founder, and that this has created lingering questions of loyalty for many party leaders who served under Rawlings but now identify with the current president. Nketia said that the NDC is struggling to define itself as a party independent of personalities, and that they must find a way to manage the "political force of Rawlings" without making him irrelevant. Nketia stressed that if the Mills government is undermined from within, it will not be possible to remain in power for another term.

¶11. (C) Nketia said that former First Lady Nana Agyeman Rawlings' decision to run for a vice chairman position is a special challenge, and has brought party divisions to the surface. He noted that as there are six vice chairmen (and the top six vote-getters will win), it is likely that Nana Rawlings will prevail. For Nketia, the question will then be whether she will "submit to the will of the party," or pursue her own agenda and increase divisions. Nketia said that if Nana Rawlings works as part of the team, supporting the NDC government, she could be a major asset for the party. Akwetia admitted that managing Mrs. Rawlings' ego within the party structure will be difficult, and noted that for more than three decades she has not operated within the party structures.

¶12. (C) Nketia said that if the former President and First Lady want to influence the future of the party, they would have done better to encourage one of their daughters - for example Amina Rawlings - to contest a parliamentary seat in the Ashanti region. That, said Nketia, would help the party develop in a typically pro-NPP region, and would promote the Rawlings' influence in the future NDC.

¶13. (C) While admitting divisions within the party and some "disgruntlement," both Bagbin and Nketia downplayed the view that there is a "Rawlings" faction that is working against

ACCRA 00001325 003 OF 003

Mills. They noted that many NDC leaders, including themselves, served under Rawlings and admire him as the party's founder and as a national leader. Bagbin stressed that NDC leaders understand that the party's success is linked to President Mills. Nketia noted that the NDC historically has had dissenting voices and that the current situation is much better than what occurred prior to the 1995 party congress when the party hierarchy was at odds with Rawlings.

Comment

¶14. (C) Nketia and Bagbin's comments suggest that the NDC leadership understands the need to address dissatisfaction within the party as it works toward its January party conference. At the same time, there appears to be a common view that many of the criticisms of the Mills Administration are valid and commonly shared among senior NDC officials. Whether Mills, who operates at a deliberate pace, is able to address the substance of those complaints - including involving the quality of his advisors and lack of inter-ministerial coordination - remains to be seen. Both Bagbin and Nketia were optimistic that the December 9 meeting

produced good results and that the January conference provides a further opportunity to close ranks. Nevertheless, if Mills is unable to address the substance of NDC complaints, it is likely that public criticism will resume.
End Comment.
TEITELBAUM